

Summer School

Exploring buildings and places in North West Ulster

Primrose Wilson

Following the success of the 2015 Summer School in Armagh & Monaghan it was decided to embark on another one, but this time in North West Ulster. The Councils concerned already work closely together and Donegal's Heritage Officer, Joe Gallagher, was enthusiastic and had worked with Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS) previously to raise awareness of Gola Island's architectural heritage.

Site visit to Scutcher's Cottage, Newmills, Co. Donegal



Having ascertained interest from Donegal County Council and Derry City & Strabane District Councils, as well as agreement from Kevin Mulligan that he would take on his previous role as Academic Director, the Societies began making plans for the second Summer School. The willingness of all concerned to work together, on the part of both Boards and office staff, was a hallmark of the project.

We began in Letterkenny with a lecture by Barry O'Reilly on the Donegal vernacular cottage. This discourse combined perfectly with Donegal County Council's exhibition "In Search of the Donegal Vernacular Cottage" being held in the Museum, where we ended the evening. The following morning we met in the main hall of the Guildhall in Derry for a series of lectures, including tracing the origins of the City and its hinterland, heritage tourism in North

West Ulster and recent developments in the City. After lunch we set out with our speakers and Dan Calley, author of the UAHS publication on Derry, to walk the Walls and view the developments outlined in the talks.

The heavens opened shortly after we sallied forth and we were all saturated. One group squelched into St. Columb's Cathedral and continued the discussions with Manus Deery on the treatment of the interior. Every time he moved to the door to continue the walk, some interesting item helped delay our return to the unwelcoming precipitation! Fortunately the Verbal Arts Centre had lots of radiators to dry sodden clothes and we all steamed happily through Stephen Douglas' (Hall Black Douglas Architects) stimulating talk and discussion.

The day concluded in The Glassworks, the former Third Presbyterian Church; this fine neo-Classical building closes the vista of the street in dramatic fashion and has a flight of steps edged with massive stone scrolls. Yaima Gil, who works in the Office of the City Historian in Havana, Cuba, was our final speaker on Thursday. Her topic was "Heritage Led Regeneration and Tourism; An International Perspective". A work in progress since the late 1970s, the piecing-back-together of Havana Vieja, after decades of neglect, has been a far-sighted and startlingly miraculous process considering the economic odds stacked against it. The genius behind the project is Eusebio Leal Spengler, Havana's celebrated City Historian who, unperturbed by the tightening of the financial screws during Cuba's Special Period, set up Habaguanex in 1994; this holding company earns hard currency through tourism and re-invests it in a mix of historical preservation and city-wide urban regeneration.

In *Lest We Forget* (Vol.2, 2005) Spengler wrote how in 1999 "the Directorate of the Master Plan produced *Utopian Challenge*", a publication that outlined the principles adopted for the restoration of the historic core. He said in *Utopian Challenge* that "the novelty of this plan lies in our determination to create a prototype of social and community participation through a decentralised model of local development, with political and legal support".

While projects like this elsewhere in the world would undoubtedly lead to gentrification and relocation of the local population, this has not happened in Havana. The city's urban jigsaw is a living, working environment, with schools, hospitals and care homes sitting alongside tourist restaurants and museums. Designated a World Heritage Site in 1982 by UNESCO, to date, a quarter of Havana Vieja has been restored; this includes hotels, forts and over 30 museums. The restoration of Havana Vieja has promoted large numbers of restaurants, cafes, small hotels, shops and all the infrastructure needed to sustain an ever-growing tourist trade; this in turn provides income for restoration and social projects. To facilitate the work, Habaguanex established craft schools in the 1990s when older people with traditional skills were still around to pass them on to the young. Yaima's presentation met with a well-deserved standing ovation. Her visit to Ireland was made possible with the help and support of the British Council and was the highlight of the Summer School.

After a warm welcome from the Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council, Fidelma Mullane set the scene with "Placemaking" on Friday morning. Then we took off in different directions by bus—some to the Fanad Lighthouse with visits to vernacular cottages to observe thatching, others to a traditional farmyard scheme at Treantagh House, funded by the Heritage Council, and still others to a modern vernacular at St. Aengus, Burt. At Fort Stewart we enjoyed a lovely private house, learned of its history and drank in the most amazing views of Lough Swilly!

All groups came together in Ramelton Old Meeting house to hear Edward McParland, Duncan McLaren and Greg Stevenson speak about heroic efforts to preserve our more modest architectural heritage and provide lovely places for us to enjoy holiday breaks courtesy of the Irish Landmark Trust and Under The Thatch.

The highlight of Friday evening was refreshments in Conway's Bar, Ramelton, followed by a pub quiz compered by Kevin Mulligan. The challenge was to stop laughing for long enough to listen for answers from the next table and to avoid the yellow cards handed out liberally by the referee! The following day we visited Holy Hill, an attractive

early-18th-century private house with a fascinating history. Our final destination of the weekend was the Stables in Sion Mills where Karen Latimer outlined the trials and tribulations of the restoration of this building by HEARTH (Hearth Housing Association). We were able to see for ourselves the triumph of the completed project. In a very fitting accolade one of the students wrote afterwards of the Summer School how Karen "embodied the qualities of persistence and dedication that are essential to ensuring the protection of the precious built heritage of our communities". Emma McGarrity wrote in her blog post about the Summer School (<http://bit.ly/CWF17EMG>) "the weekend reinvigorated my love of all aspects of our unique built heritage and...I gained a wealth of knowledge, experience and contacts". We had thirty amazing students on the Summer School from a variety of disciplines, including Art History, Architecture, Geography, Engineering, Museum and Cultural studies. The students were truly inspirational as they were full of enthusiasm and fun and so appreciative of the opportunity to visit rejuvenated historic buildings, engage everyone in conversation and generally enjoy themselves. I leave the last word to Eoin Madigan, a SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) Fellow, who came all the way from Co. Clare to be with us: "I returned home with a spring in my step after being inspired by such passionate people of all ages and backgrounds. This event is a true credit to world of conservation and I am privileged to have been a part of it".

This event could not have happened without sponsorship from the British Council, Consarc Conservation, Derry City & Strabane District Council, Donegal County Council, Esme Mitchell Trust and the Heritage Council. Both Societies gratefully acknowledge their assistance, advice and guidance. Kevin Mulligan was an excellent Academic Director while Manus Deery and Joe Gallagher's help and local knowledge in Derry and Donegal was invaluable. We had a wonderful group of speakers and guides who enlightened and entertained us in sunshine and showers! Our especial thanks go to Nikki McVeigh, Eva McDermott



and Connie Gerrow (UAHS) and Zoë Coleman, Donough Cahill (IGS) for arranging a programme with amazing skill and dexterity. Thanks John Geraghty, IGS volunteer, for his time and effort over the four days. They guided us around highways and byways, provided sandwiches in a barn in Donegal, pizzas from a horse-box in Ramelton and the most delicious home made cakes and coffee from a caravan beside a Meeting House!

Primrose Wilson, instigator of the Conservation without Frontiers Summer School is President of UAHS, Chair of The Follies Trust, Chair of the IGS Conservation Grants Committee and a board member of the Irish Georgian Foundation.

01 Walking tour of Derry, led by Manus Deery, outside St. Columba's Cathedral **02** Liam McCormick's St Aengus' Church (1967) in Burt, Co. Donegal **03** Student Design Competition winners, pictured with Kevin V. Mulligan, Primrose Wilson and Joe Gallagher with students Emma McGarrity (UU), Steven Playford (HW), Katherine Baldwin (UCD) and Chris (Cambridge) **04** Eoin Madigan, stone mason and SPAB fellow (2014) demonstrating the use of lime mortar at Treantagh House, St Johnston, Co. Donegal **05** Fanad Lighthouse, Co. Donegal **06** Visiting speaker Yaima Gil (Cuba) and Edward McParland at Holy Hill, Strabane **07** Participants outside Holy Hill House **08** Exploring the interior of Fanad Lighthouse, Co. Donegal